

From the Foot of the Cross



The Passionist Nuns of Saint Joseph Monastery in the Diocese of Owensboro KY

Autumn 2014



The Prayer of a Contemplative Nun: At Missionary Apostolate



Sister Mary Therese of Jesus Crucified
1964 ~ September 15 ~ 2014

Sr. Mary Therese was born in Paducah, KY December 11, 1940 of John and Rosalee Seitz, and baptized Elizabeth (Betty) Dale Seitz at St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church, the sixth of eight children. Her father was a railroad engineer and her mother a housewife. The family lived on 140 acres of land John had inherited. There in the midst of a natural solitude, Betty's artistic soul gently opened to the reflection of God's beauty all around her, whether she was helping with farm work or was sitting reflectively by the creek bank. "I remember sitting for long periods of time on a creek bank listening to the water and just wondering about things like the birds, insects and animals." She also found a little place in the woods where she would go to pray to Our

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On August 10, 2014 our Most Reverend Bishop William F. Medley together with several priests, as well as family and friends joined us for the Golden Jubilee Mass of Thanksgiving of our Sr. Mary Therese of Jesus Crucified. It is our joy in this issue of our newsletter to share the story of God's love at work in her Passionist vocation. How did one who longed so ardently to be an active missionary Sister in a foreign land end up in a cloister, of all places?? Let's tell you the story.



Sister greets **Bishop Medley** (at right) and **Msgr. Bernard Powers** during her Golden Jubilee reception. Our chaplain, **Fr. Ray Clark**, is at left in the back.



Elizabeth Dale Seitz born December 11, 1940 and baptized four days later.





Betty upon her graduation from St. John's Catholic School in 1959.

Blessed Mother, and at times would sing at the top of her voice.

Sr. Mary Therese loved her parents very much and was deeply impressed by what they did and said. "They taught us what sacrifice was mainly by their own example."

As Betty attended school at St. John's, she was very drawn by the example of her teachers, the Sisters of Mercy, and grew to admire them greatly. She recounts: "It seemed I was close to God when I was around them, and the dream of being one of them someday as a missionary Sister in some foreign country never left me all through my school days."

While reading mission magazines given her by her teachers, Betty's heart was deeply torn by the photos



John and Rosa Lee celebrate their 25th Wedding Anniversary November 28, 1953

of so many suffering and destitute people throughout the world. Longing to do something to relieve their sufferings, she hoped one day to be a religious Sister working among them.

Betty was especially happy one year when she and some of her friends saved enough money to sponsor a child in the missions. Betty was the one privileged to name the child, and received a photo of the baby later when it was baptized. She was thrilled and her sense of a call to be a missionary grew.

This call, she says, "was not like the Hound of Heaven as much as it was God's presence --pursuing and calling me in ways I could not dream of. I never found myself running away



Sr. Mary Therese shortly after her Passionist Profession of Vows in 1964

from the dream I had. It was something that was with me all the time. I did not understand what this presence was, but I did recognize something drawing me to be a religious Sister."

It was "this strong something inside me" that Betty finally responded to one Saturday morning as she sat alone at the breakfast table. The night before, she had attended a senior class party filled with fun and laughter. As she sat there going over in her mind the things that happened the night before, she suddenly had a strange, empty feeling within, something she had never experienced before. She found herself wondering about the future. Parties and everything life had to offer were very exciting but this sudden empty feeling told her that these things were not satisfying her.

A profound question arose out of this deep empty feeling: Betty, what are you going to do with your life?" She knew this question demanded an answer. Suddenly, religious life was before her again — "that presence."



Sr. Mary Therese collecting dried flowers at the property in Whitesville, where construction would soon begin on the new monastery, chapel and retreat house.

Thus it was that shortly after her high school graduation, Betty entered the Sisters of Mercy of Cincinnati, OH. She was happy with the Sisters except for one thing. That persistent desire to be a missionary Sister was still there, yet there was no indication that this was ever going to happen. After two years and 4 months in the convent, God's will became clear: this was not where God wanted her to be. Her provincial asked if she had ever thought of the contemplative life. At the time, such an idea was the farthest thought from her mind. Her heart was still set on being a missionary out on the front lines, as it were. Leaving the Mercy Sisters was very hard, yet Betty was convinced in her heart, "I will be a Sister someday." When she returned home, her father hugged her and said rather prophetically, "God has another place for you."

For the next nine months, Betty waited in patience as if in the womb of God's will, until something new was born in

her life. As she read the life of St. Therese of Lisieux, a cloistered Carmelite Nun who is the co-Patroness of the Church's Missions, Betty was deeply inspired. St. Therese too longed to be a missionary, but that was not God's will for her either. At this time, Betty did not realize that as in the case of St. Therese, God wanted a different kind of missionary apostolate for her too.

Still in darkness as to what God wanted, Betty sought advice from her Pastor, Fr. Richard Clements, who arranged that she make a weekend retreat at our monastery in Owensboro. It was during that retreat, that something new stirred in Betty's heart. It was a turning point in her life, and soon she was accepted as a postulant for our community. Betty entered the Passionist Nuns on September 12, 1962, and a year later received the name "Sr. Mary Therese of Jesus Crucified". She made her temporary



Christie and Sr. Mary Therese created gorgeous Christmas wreaths

vows on September 15, 1964. In God's mysterious providence, Betty was to be neither a Sister of Mercy nor an active missionary laboring in foreign lands, but rather, a contemplative Passionist Nun with a worldwide missionary "apostolate" of prayer and penance.

Throughout the past 52 years, Sr. Mary Therese has lived in spirit with Our Mother of Sorrows at the foot of the cross, uniting the sacrifice of her life with that of Our Lord. Sister has generously placed her gifts at the service of the community in so many ways, serving as novice directress, monastery council member, cook, seamstress, artist and gardener.

Very early in Sister's religious life, her superior discovered her outstanding artistic talent. Her water color greeting cards and spiritual bouquet cards have delighted many both inside and outside the monastery throughout these years. More recently, her efforts have been focused on producing Plaster of Paris "Infants on the Cross", as well as lovely oil paintings for the monastery online gift shop.



Fishing on a free day

Having won blue ribbons and even a purple ribbon for excellence in sewing, as a member of her high school 4H Club, Sr. Mary Therese has made many of our habits, veils and other garments, besides beautiful altar panels in the various liturgical colors to add to the solemnity of our liturgies.

Her natural gift for cooking has also been put to good use, as well as her gardening abilities. The many flower beds that grace the monastery and guest house entrance way are planted each year and lovingly cared for by Sr. Mary Therese.

Sister recently summed it all up: "As you can see, my life has nothing extraordinary about it. Just a simple little country girl who found her way into the sanctuary of God's house. As the Spouse of Jesus Crucified, I can always be a missionary Sister at heart, for Jesus was the greatest missionary that ever came into this world. My dream is being fulfilled at every moment through prayer, penance and sacrifice, and by having Jesus' sufferings and death always in my heart. This is God's gift to me, and it is this gift that I share daily with the Church and the whole world through faith, hope and love."

Family, Faith & Friends

The photos at left show many of the relatives and friends who joined Sister Mary Therese on the day of her 50 Anniversary Mass and reception. Her three sisters were present along with one of her brothers. We missed her other two brothers, **Charles Seitz** and **Robert Seitz**, who were unable to attend. Her brother **Tommy Seitz** went home to the Lord 22 years ago. We know they were with us in spirit!



The Passionist Bride of Christ renews her five vows to her Bridegroom within the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.



Jerri Durbin and Kathy Seitz assist their sister in the offertory procession bringing forth bread and wine, symbolizing a renewal of the gift of self Sr. Mary Therese made 50 years ago.

Photos on this page Larena Lawson



Bishop Medley is vested in a new Marian chasuble—a gift in honor of Sr. Mary Therese's 50 Years of Passionist Profession. It is customary in our monastery to purchase something special, often something for use in Liturgy, when one of our sisters celebrates a jubilee.

At right in the photo is **Fr. Ben Luther**, formerly pastor for 12 years of Saint John the Evangelist Catholic Church, Mary Therese' home parish, who gave the homily for this festive occasion.



Sr. Mary Therese with her sisters **Kathy Seitz** and **Bernadette Englert**



Paul Durbin, Mark, Eddie, sister Jerri and Cindy



Great niece **Audrey** , brother **Lawrence** and his wife **Judy** with little **Kadie** and **Kaiya**



Nephew **Billy Seitz**



Niece **Julie**, sister **Bernadette Englert**, nephew **Danny**



Sr. Mary Therese and **Sr. Ellen Curl, R.S.M.** were in the novitiate together with the Sisters of Mercy.



J.C. and Christen Warren with their son **Brayden**



Shannon and great nephew **Derrick** with **Maddie** and **Sylvie**



Niece **Janie** and great niece **Jenna**



Gary Campbell and **Barbara**, nephew **Tony Seitz**, **Josh** and **Leigh Anne**



Loving God Through Pas

Orange was the color of our monastic celebration of Sr. Mary Dolores' 50 Years of Passionist Profession. What brought this about? It all harkens back to a funny story from her days in the kitchen. One day Sr. Mary Agnes, a young junior professed sister, reported for kitchen duty and was told they would be processing 27 donated pumpkins! This legendary day piqued the imagination of the younger sisters and they created a hilarious skit about it. Below Sr. Rose Marie plays Sr. Mary Agnes and Sr. Cecilia Maria plays head cook Sr. Mary "Delicious." See the blog for more photos and the skit text!



Special greetings to all our friends and be of prayer hidden in the heart of the CH. Elizabeth and Nora. Seated: Sr. Mary Veron Marie, Sr. John Mary, Sr. Mary Magdalen Affiliate Christie, Sr. Marie Michael, Sr. Maria, Sr. Therese Marie, Sr. Mary Dolor Miriam, who resides at Carmel Home.



On July 1st, Sr. Rose Marie renewed her temporary profession of vows for another three years. Here she is with an image of our Sorrowful Mother she painted in honor of Mother Catherine Marie on her feast day.

Right after breakfast on Saturday mornings is the time for harvesting Peppermint and Spearmint from the Mint Henge rock garden.

Check out our website passionistnuns.org

Missionist Communal Life



Last fall Sr. John Mary began to build a rock garden around the patio of our cloister courtyard. It took 6 months to create, and some sisters were getting nervous that it would never be finished! For more photos see the blog.



benefactors whose support makes our life
 church a possibility! Kneeling: Postulants
 nica, Sr. Mary Agnes, Mother Catherine
 . Standing: Sr. Mary Elizabeth, Oblate
 ary Therese, Sr. Rose Marie, Sr. Cecilia
 es, Sr. Mary Andrea. Missing: Sr. Ann



Harvesting rocks from our creek beds this past spring



& while you are there click on the **BLOG**

**So,
YOUR DAUGHTER
Wants to BE a
WHAT?!!!!!!!**

The following reflection was written by **Matt Wenke** on the occasion of his daughter **Nora** entering our monastery.

When other men's daughters might have expressed an interest in the convent or the cloister, I wouldn't have questioned it at all. I would have been respectful of their choice and genuinely happy for them. "What a noble and beautiful vocation!" or "What a meaningful life with a holy purpose!" I, no doubt, would have thought.

When I heard of my own daughter's interest in the cloister, my immediate thought was, "Oh my gosh, I hope you get a vacation... how often can you come home to visit?!!!" Isn't this sad... that my first thought wasn't just about Nora's vocational fulfillment and spiritual well being? My initial thought was about the fact that I might be missing my daughter's presence in my home and her gentle, delightful company.

The reason I had these thoughts is that I did know some things about the cloister. I'd read Saint Therese's autobiography, *Story of a Soul*, with its description of her entrance into the cloister and having to say goodbye to her grieving father and sister, Celine. I've always had a hard time with goodbyes, so even then, when I was in my twenties, I could hardly imagine saying goodbye to my family and homeland to embrace religious life, largely away from those I'd been closest to and loved, dearly.

As time went on, I observed Nora's spiritual confidence and serenity in her vocational choice as she first visited the Passionist nuns for a week-long "Come and see" discernment in November-December of 2013 and her three month "Aspirancy Visit" from February to May of 2014. Before February, I'd been dreading that goodbye to my only daughter. I will never forget my pain and dread of parting as months led up to that tender February day.

While waiting and praying through that time, I asked myself... "Should I try to make her stay?" Should I "guilt trip" her into worrying about my grief and sadness, as some of my more sentimental family members might have done? I pondered the selfishness of that and the manipulation and misuse of power and control dynamics which that might have represented. I thought of guilt feelings I would have if I looked at my daughter, entrapped by my selfishness and knew that, due to my selfishness, she was trapped into a life she wasn't choosing for herself, just to placate me and/or relieve herself of unearned guilt and/or unhealthy desire to please selfish others in her life.

The thought of that horrified me! Especially, since I'd considered religious life for years, myself. I wondered how I might have felt if someone had emotion-



Nora here kneels before the enclosure door, about to ask for admission to the postulancy. The hands of her parents, **Matt** and **Mary**, rest upon her shoulders as a sign of their blessing as Nora continues to follow God's unfolding plan for her life.

ally entrapped me from making a free choice about my vocation and lifestyle. I know that I might have come to resent that person and to grieve for what I thought I should have pursued in order to answer our loving Lord's attractive calling.

I looked at my daughter. A pure soul. A deeply spiritual young woman, wanting to discern God's call for her, freely. She has the desire to conform herself to God's Will that I have prayed for, for all of my children, whether God's call be to the single life, marriage, lay ministry or consecrated religious life. To be authentic followers, we have to be open to all choices, not just for ourselves, but for all of those we love and for all of God's children.

When Nora came home from her three month aspirancy visit to Kentucky, she never fully returned. Her body was home, but her spirit belonged to a cloistered convent in Kentucky. She loved us the same and "adjusted" to being home. However, she reminded me after a day or two that this was "no longer her life". She assured me that "I don't have a life here, anymore." "I need to be going about God's work for me, and it isn't here, anymore." She didn't say this, meanly. It was just a statement of fact. I was shocked and, I will admit, somewhat tender about her words... but,

deep down, I knew the truth of them. From that moment, I began to prepare myself for a more final parting to take place at the end of July, 2014, when Nora began her year long postulancy. At the end of that time, if she still feels called to the cloister, she will never return home to Olean, New York.

Nora's words to me reminded me of Jesus' words to his Mom and Dad, (Mary and Joseph) at the finding in the temple... "Did you not know that I must be about my father's business?" Certainly, his words cut them a little... but they had to "know" the deep spiritual truth of them. Like Jesus, Nora obediently followed the plan... to be with us until the end of July. However, she had spoken the words. This visit was temporary. We must not mistake that. She had to be about her Heavenly Father's business, later in the Summer.

From May 22nd until July 26th, when we returned to Kentucky, I prayed for courage and faith and love to let my daughter go. I prayed to have the courage and love to give back to God, she whom He'd only loaned to us for nearly nineteen years, my only daughter. God gave His Son for me. Could I place back in His loving arms the beautiful daughter He had created?!

I won't lie to you or pretend to be a strong, courageous man. I cried and

cried countless times as I looked at my beloved daughter, praying the rosary beside me each night, and tears came to me as I looked at her, across the room at Morning prayer or during our recitation of the Angelus, many days at Noon. I memorized the sound of her voice and really concentrated that she was asleep at night, safe in her own room, in my house, under my roof. Not one day of her two month visit did I take her presence for granted. Like before her aspirancy visit, I treasured the time with my daughter.

Because of her vocational choice, I did a lot of reflection on the contemplative lifestyle... giving all to God and focusing on Him and His sorrowful mother, around the clock. I contemplated the peace and deep meaning and power of that lifestyle. While I still dreaded saying goodbye to Nora, I could understand her excitement and joy and even envy it, at noisy times of chaos at home or at work! I surmised that some spiritual part of me will join her in her new home and that her prayers in the cloister

will be united with ours at home or at Mass as is known as the "Communion of Saints". Dear God, give us courage, comfort and deep love as we live this out!

Well, the 27th of July came. The Gospel reading was perfect for that day... about finding a precious pearl and buying the field, in order to hide and later possess that valuable pearl or "treasure". Nora had found her love for the



Join us in thanking and praising God for the gift of two postulants. Please pray the Lord to send more holy and happy candidates to all our Passionist monasteries!

Lord and desire to give all to Him and to be totally possessed by Him! My daughter is a singular treasure who needs to be in a place worthy of the treasure which she is! This "pearl" will be joined to the string of precious pearls, which is the Sisters. She will be balanced and placed in just the right place to further enhance the beauty of Jesus' chain of pearls who are already there, in the cloister. Each pearl is unique. One is not more beautiful than another. Yet, they all add to the beauty and completeness of the chain!

I contemplated and contemplated that reading. I observed with joy and wonder and awe Nora's radiant joy upon returning to the cloister. Nothing bad for her could bring her this visible joy and peace and ecstasy she seemed to be experiencing! I prayed more and more for courage and joy in me, as well. Guess what.... God gave them to me! I was shocked on the morning of Nora's entrance, that her joy and love were infectious. I couldn't think about myself. I could only think about my daughter's joyful, unselfish, pure and FREE decision to enter cloistered religious life... and to give ALL to God! What is sad about that? Nothing! My daughter entered the cloister with my smiles and my blessing and my glorifying God.... For calling my dear daughter. She belongs to Him! So do you and me!



Nora with her parents Matt and Mary and five brothers l-r: Jude, Brother Emmanuel, O.F.M. Conv., Sam, Matthew (front) and Abe. We look forward to deepening our friendship with this wonderful family!

What About You?

Are you thinking of joining?

Is your daughter/granddaughter or other loved one thinking of joining the sisters or embracing a religious vocation?

Are you encouraging free choices of vocations or are you just protecting your own sentimental feelings or dread of tender moments of sacrifice?

I challenge you to give up all. My wife's frequent words keep coming back to me. "God will not be out-done in generosity!"

Don't be ashamed of your sadness, tenderness and hurt. These are normal feelings as we have a lifetime of love for our daughters, granddaughters, sisters and friends! Celebrate that love, but don't spoil it by having it be an obstacle to your loved one's free choice.

Pray for courage and love and generosity. It will take all of these. As our parish priest reminded us... we're not giving up our daughter, we're just learning to hold her in a new way!"

Don't deprive yourself of a chance to sacrifice. Don't deprive God of His Beloved Bride... your loved one!

Be assured of my prayers for you, whether you are the aspiring nun or her family and/or loved ones.

May God bless you all. May God's Will be done unto and by all of us...for only with conformity to the Will of God will we know peace and love and contentment in this life as well as in the next!

Prayerfully,

Matthew R. Wenke
Father of Nora Wenke,
postulant at Passionist Nuns,
St. Joseph's Monastery
Whitesville, Kentucky.
August 3, 2014, (One week after our daughter's entrance).



Nora, our new postulant, is keen to build a firm foundation - on solid rock! - for her religious life. We have more rocks - anyone interested in joining her?! 😊



Jane Wynn (at right) recently gave time and treasure to help us develop a new blog theme. Don't miss the new look!

www.passionistnunsblog.com

Tim Wynn is crafting wood plaques for the nuns to decorate and make available in our Passionist Inspiration shop.

Chuck Hagan (left) built us a shelf for our microwave oven in our guest dinette.



Passionist Oblate Family purchased, prepped, served and cleaned up the food for the reception for Sr. Mary Therese's Golden Jubilee celebration.

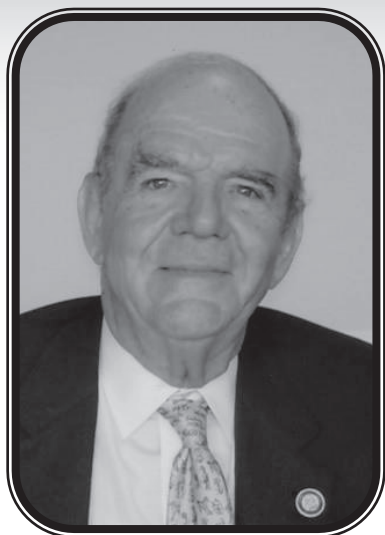
Mother Catherine Marie gives a big hug to **Larena Lawson**, the skilled photographer for all of our special public ceremonies.



Not all who helped were present for this photo

A Loving Remembrance of Our Deceased

Robert H. Steele



"Happy now are the dead who die in the Lord!...Yes, they shall find rest from their labors, for their good works accompany them" (Revelation 14:13).

A dear friend and benefactor of our community went home to the Lord on Corpus Christi Sunday, June 22, 2014. A man of kind heart, a prudent and generous steward of God's many gifts, Robert H. "Bob" Steele, as President of the Steele Foundation in Owensboro, was very instrumental, along with other family members, in launching the relocation of our monastery and helping us complete the project.

When his father, Vincent Joseph Steele, Sr., first became a good friend and confidant of the foundress of our Owensboro monastery, Mother Mary Agnes Roche, neither of them could ever have dreamed of the part his children would play 50 years later in the relocation of our monastic community to a quieter area more conducive to preserving our contemplative life into the future! God's providence in weaving people and events

together in order to advance the needs of His people is truly marvelous. As we write this tribute, we thank God who gave Bob and the members of the Steele Foundation the deep faith to realize the spiritual value of our project from the outset. While others were saying, "What do those crazy Nuns think they are doing?!", the Steele Foundation, spearheaded by Bob, got us off to a good start by purchasing our 150 acre Crisp Road property as well as giving us a large matching grant.

We cannot refrain here from mentioning how Bob asked his younger brother Jack, to do a lot of the "footwork" in selecting suitable property. Surely their parents and Mother Mary Agnes Roche were "looking down from heaven" with amusement as they saw a couple of Nuns riding with Jack on an ATV to inspect several rugged sites!

This beautiful location amid rural Kentucky farmland, the statue of St. Joseph (donated by Bob's parents in 1953) greeting all guests arriving at our monastery, the lovely stained glass window in our chapel (donated by Bob), and the Steele Foundation plaque on our donor board, and most of all the deep gratitude inscribed in our "heritage of memories" will keep alive our grateful appreciation of this kind and generous man and the Steele Foundation, whose deep understanding of Christian stewardship prompted so much generosity not only to our community but also to many other people and causes.

Bob was preceded in death by his parents, Vincent J. and Pauline Steele, his brothers V.J. Steele Jr., Charles C. Steele, and his sisters, Pauline Steele and Mary Anne Steele.

He is survived by his wife, Mary Lou Steele and her children, Ray (Susan) Assmar, Ann (John) Gasser, and Kathy (John) Anderson, as well as grandchildren, Preston Anderson, Yasmin Gasser, Robert Gasser and Raye Anderson; along with his sisters, Ruth (Bo) Reed, Sarah Edge; his brother, Jack (Kay) Steele, his sister-in-law, Beverly Steele; and 22 nieces and nephews.

Eternal rest grant to him, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him. May He rest in peace.



The chapel, monastery and retreat house are situated on the central portion of the property donated by Bob and the Steele Foundation

FROM THE FOOT OF THE CROSS

Passionist Nuns
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Dear Relatives and Friends,

This is always my treasured place in our newsletter to thank each of you for your appreciation of the value of our cloistered contemplative life for the Church and the world, as well as for your donations and personal services to our community. Our hearts remain deeply, deeply grateful.

We leave you these closing thoughts: St. John Paul the Great told the Church that there are never any grounds for losing hope in God. Never, no matter how dangerous the horizon appears or how much evil spreads, there are never any grounds for losing divine hope.

The picture to the right depicts an apparition of Our Mother of Hope, also known as Our Lady of Pontmain, and the Madonna of the Crucifix. She appeared to townspeople who were left unprotected by their own military at a time of war. Mary said, "Pray, my children; God will soon answer your prayers. My Son allows Himself to be moved with compassion." In the apparition, Mary was seen praying with a large red crucifix held over her Heart. The crucifix is the battle armor of a Christian. As the people poured out their hearts in prayer together, suddenly the enemy forces withdrew their troops and 10 days later an armistice was signed. In this true story, Mary teaches us to put our hope in the power and triumph of the cross of Jesus, through which evil is destroyed. Praying with the merits of the Cross and Passion of Jesus can stop wars.



Please join us in praying with Mary, Mother of Divine Hope and Help of Christians, through the power of the Passion of Jesus, to preserve our nation, and all the nations of the world, from moral degeneration, natural disasters and war! And as you join us in prayer, be assured that we are always praying for you.

Mother Catherine Marie and the Passionist Nuns of Whitesville, Kentucky

Please remember us in your will and help continue our contemplative Passionist mission.